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ABSTRACT

For the past 2000 years the Ramayana has been among the most important literary and oral texts of South Asia. This epic poem provides insights into many aspects of Indian culture and continues to influence the politics, religion, and art of modern India. This booklet contains material designed to provide an entry into the study of this tradition. The booklet is divided into the following sections: The first five sections are: (1) "The Story of Rama" (brief version); (2) "The Story of Rama" (long version, adapted for classroom use by Larry Tominberg); (3)"Images and Maps"; (4) "Hinduism"; (5) "Moral Dilemmas". The "Moral Dilemmas" section is in the form of a lesson plan with a rationale, objectives, detailed procedure, and extensions for the moral dilemma lessons. The last four sections are: (6) "Glossary"; (7) "Oral Tradition and the Many Ramayanas'" (Philip Lutgendorf); (8) "The Story of the Bengali Scrolls"; and (9) "Links and Resources." The "Links and Resources" section contains 12 bibliographies on seminar material and 18 bibliographies on Ghandi and miscellaneous, 8 picture books, 2 children's fiction books, 11 descriptions and travel books (with appropriate grades indicated), 15 history texts, 22 folklore and myth texts, 9 books on religion, and 25 texts on Hinduism. (Contains 16 useful web sites.) (BT)

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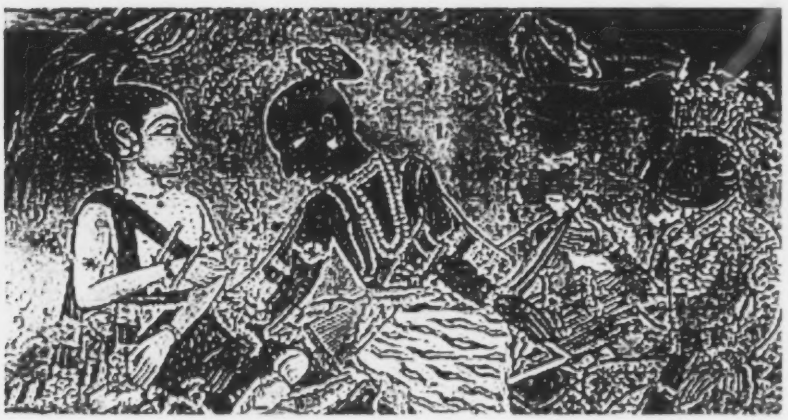

the Ramayana

an enduring tradition

For the past two thousand years the Ramayana has been among the most important literary and oral texts of South Asia. This epic poem provides insights into many aspects of Indian culture and continues to influence the politics, religion and art of modern India. The following material is designed to provide an entry into the study of this tradition. We hope that it will be useful to teachers and students of Indian culture.

This work is collected from the institute, "The Ramayana, an Enduring Tradition: its Text and Context" in 1997 and an earlier Ramayana Institute in 1994, as well as updates from the South Asia Center at Syracuse University. Thanks is due to the National Endowment for the Humanities and the American Forum for Global Education which provided funding and to Syracuse University which acted as host. Our greatest gratitude is for the guidance provided by Professor Susan S. Wadley of Syracuse University who designed and led this seminar.

The Story of Rama
A Very Brief Synopsis

Retiring King Dasaratha of Ayodha chooses his son Rama as his heir. His wife Kaikeyi asks that he appoint another son Bharata, instead. Kaikeyi pleads that he owes her two favors, and she feels misfortune will come upon her if he doesn't crown Bharata king and banish Rama to the forest for fourteen years. The king reluctantly agrees, so Rama goes with his beautiful wife, Sita, and his brother Laksmana, leaving their riches to live a simple life.

In the forest the three meet the demoness Surpanakha who falls in love with Rama. Rama refuses her advances and Laksmana wounds her. She flees to her brother Ravana, ruler of the island kingdom of Lanka. After hearing Surpanakha's report of the beauty of Sita, Ravana decides that he must have Sita and changes himself into in wandering holy man to find her in the forest. When Rama and Laksmana are distracted, Ravana carries Sita off to Lanka.

Sita mourns in Ravana's garden in Lanka, while Rama and Laksmana enlist the services of Hanuman, the monkey king, to help them find her. Hanuman, able to make himself larger or smaller, starts his search for Sita by taking a giant step to the Island of Lanka. Carrying Rama's ring he finds Sita and identifies himself as Rama's messenger. Sita is delighted, but Hanuman is caught and Ravana sets Hanuman's tail on fire. Hanuman escapes and sets fire to Lanka.

Rama, Laksmana, Hanuman, and his monkey army lay siege on Lanka. The monkeys make a bridge to Lanka, and after a long battle with spears, bows and arrows, Rama kills Ravana. Sita, however, is not received by Rama unreservedly; he questions her chastity after having lived in the house of another man. When he asks her to undergo the test by fire; she agrees. Proving her chastity by remaining unscathed by the fire, she rejoins Rama. Later, Rama abandons her to maintain the sanctity of public opinion and she goes to live in the ashram of sage Valmiki and bears twin sons Lava and Kusa, who as young men became reunited with their father, the god-king Rama.

Ramayana Versions--an incomplete list

Author	Text	Date	Local/language	Major Themes
Valmiki	Srimad Valmiki Ramayana	2nd c. BCE?	Sanskrit	Ram as man/god Valmiki as original poet Includes Uttara Kanda--Sita's banishment
Kamban	Iramavataram	12th c.	Tamil	1st vernacular version Bhakti version Sympathetic view of Surpanakha, Ravana
Buddha Reddi	Ranganha Ramayana	13th c.	Andhra/Telugu	
Krittivasa	Ramayana	14th c.	Bengal/Bengali	Emphasis on battle scenes Ram does horse sacrifice Twins slay Ram Valmiki brings all back to life Twins sing Ramayan in court Sita refuses to return, enters earth Ram hears epic daily Sympathetic view of Ravana
Tulsi Das	Ramacaritamanasa	16th c.	Avadhi "Old Hindi"	"Bible of North India" Bhakti version Ram as god Chaaya Sita Ram and Sita fall in love No banishment for Sita
	Molla Ramayana	16th c.	Andhra/Telugu	
Narahari	Torave Ramayana	16th c.	Kerala/Kannada	
Ezhuttaccan	Adhyatma Ramayana	16th c.	Karnataka/Malayam	
Balarama Dasa	Jagamohana Ramayana	16th c.	Orissa/Oriya	
Premananda		17th c.	Gujarat/Gujarati	
Sridhara	Ramavijaya	18th c.	Maharastra/Marathi	
	Ramayana	18th c.	Sri Lanka/Sinhalese	Sita has 3 sons Bali does Hanuman's tasks Sita is banished because of picture of Ravana
Gunkjanctasa	Ramayana	19th c.	Gujarat/Gujarati	
Divakara Prakasa	Kasmiri Ramayana	1046	Kashmir/Kashmiri	Sita is Ravana's daughter by Mandodari Twins kill all of Ram's kin Sita refuses to return to court

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The Ramayana: A "Telling" of the Ancient Indian Epic

(This "telling" of the Ramayana story was adapted by Larry Tominberg for classroom use. If a teacher is unable to provide fuller copies of the text for use with the lessons in Spotlight on Ramayana: An Enduring Tradition, this version should be used.)

The Boyhood Of Rama

On the banks of the Sarayu River stood the beautiful city of Ayodhya, the capital of Kosala. In the city there were magnificent palaces decorated with precious stones. Spires of great temples rose above the city as if to touch the sky. For protection, the city was surrounded by a great moat. The people of Ayodhya were peace-loving and happy. No one was ignorant or poor. Everyone had faith in God and read the scriptures daily.

Each person knew his or her role in society. The brahmins devoted their lives to studying the sacred texts. The rulers and warriors governed and protected the city. The farmers and merchants fed and clothed the citizens.

Yet, all was not well in Ayodhya. Dasaratha, the king was unhappy. Although he was very old, he had no son to inherit his throne.

One day the king called upon his priest Vasistha. "Vasistha," he said. "I am growing old. I long for a son, a son who will take my place on the throne."

The priest knew all too well that his king needed to have a son. He replied, "Dasaratha, you will have sons. I shall perform a sacred rite to please the gods."

Excited by this wonderful news, the king ran to tell his three wives Sumitra, Kaikeyi, and Kausalya, "I will have sons!"

At the same moment many of the gods were growing more and more angry with Ravana, the ruler of the rakshasas, or demons. Ravana was no ordinary looking demon. He had ten heads and twenty arms. He also had remarkable powers. But he was using his power to prevent the gods and holy men from performing sacred rituals. This was a terrible insult to all who were holy.

Learning of Ravana's actions, Vishnu, the protector of the universe, decided it was time to do something. But what? Years ago Ravana was granted a boon, or promise. This boon protected him from gods and demons. How then, Vishnu wondered, could Ravana be stopped?

Vishnu thought, "Ravana, in his arrogance, protected himself only from those beings

whom he thought could hurt him. He failed to protect himself from humans and monkeys."

Vishnu decided to be born as a human who could kill Ravana. The gods and holy men were pleased with his decision.

Vishnu sent a messenger to king Dasaratha with payasam, a sweet made of milk and rice, laced with a special potion.

The messenger said, "Give each of the three wives this drink. It is a boon that will bring sons." Then the messenger disappeared.

The king gave each of his wives part of the drink. No sooner had his wives finished, than each shone with the glow of a divine being in their womb.

There was great rejoicing in the city when four sons were born to their king. Their names were Rama, Lakshmana, Bharata, and Satrughna.

Even as infants, everyone noticed that Rama and Lakshmana were inseparable. It was as if they were one life in two bodies.

All four sons grew to be intelligent men. They learned the holy scriptures well. They were devoted to the welfare of others. Dasaratha was finally happy.

He enjoyed watching his sons grow before his eyes. He did not say it in so many words, but he did have a special place in his heart for Rama.

One day the sage, or wise man, Vishvamitra came to Ayodhya to see the king. The king had great respect for him.

"Greetings, oh, wise one. What brings you to my kingdom?"

The sage said, "I have come to ask you a favor."

"How can I help? No wish is too great to ask," the king responded.

"It pleases me to hear those words from you, " said Vishwamitra.

I have been trying to perform an important sacred rite which is again and again being interrupted by Ravana's demons. My vows prevent me personally from fighting these demons."

The king listened intently.

"I pray, Dasaratha, that you allow me to take Rama with me to protect my sacred rite."

"But Rama is only a child. He is but sixteen years of age. I have a better idea. I shall send

you my armies to battle these demons. I will even accompany you. I shall fight these demons with my own hands. But please do not take Rama. Without Rama I cannot live even a few minutes."

The king began to weep.

Vishwamitra understood the king's pain. But the sage also had no choice. He knew that Rama was an avatar, or incarnation of Vishnu on earth. He also knew that only Vishnu in human form could kill Ravana.

The king told Rama about Vishwamitra's request. Rama understood and willingly went with the sage.

"I shall go, too, father," declared Lakshmana. The king did not protest.

Rama and Lakshmana, weapons slung over their shoulders, and followed the sage along the Sarayu River bank.

The journey was a long one. Whenever the three stopped to rest, the sage took the time to teach the boys how to use the powerful weapons of the gods to fight the demons.

They journeyed until they reached the foot of a frightening forest. They paused. The sage said, "This was once a beautiful and prosperous country. Now the terrible she-demon, Tataka, lives here. She attacks and kills anyone who enters."

Neither Rama nor Lakshmana were afraid.

The sage turned to Rama and said, "Now it is up to you to rid this forest of these demons. By doing so, you will restore the land to the prosperity and the peace it once enjoyed."

Rama clutched his bow and removed arrows from his quiver. Rama and Lakshmana followed Vishwamitra into the forest. They heard many strange and frightening sounds. Each step they took brought them deeper into the forest.

Suddenly there was an unearthly roar. The three men stopped. From nowhere a huge rock came hurling out of the sky heading straight for Rama. He slipped an arrow in place and drew his bow. He fired just as the rock was about to hit him. The arrow split the rock in two. The pieces fell harmlessly to earth.

Then appearing out of between two trees, Rama saw a horrible sight. It was the hideous form of the demoness, Tataka. She was enormous. Around her neck was a human skull. She had sharp claws on her hands. She looked at Rama and made a growling noise. Lakshmana decided to wait no longer. He fired his arrow and gravely wounded the demoness. A strange look came over her face as she felt the arrow pierce her flesh. Placing her hand to the wound she moaned, "What mortals have wounded me?" Then taking careful aim, Rama fired his arrow into Tataka's heart killing her.

No sooner had the she-demon died, than the gods in heaven rained lotus blossoms down on Rama blessing him. The three continued on their journey deeper into the forest. Along the way, Rama and Lakshmana killed many demons.

The sage told Rama: "I am delighted with you. I shall give you even greater weapons to defeat any enemy."

He knew that Rama's work was far from complete. There was still the powerful Ravana to deal with. It was one thing to kill Ravana's demons; it was another to kill Ravana himself.

The three finally left the forest. They headed for Mithila to visit King Janaka.

Seeing the sage, Janaka greeted him saying, "Have I told you about my daughter?"

"Please tell me about her," responded the sage.

The king spoke: "A few years ago a portion of my land was being plowed and I found a divine child in a furrow. I called her Sita and adopted her as my own daughter. She has grown into a beautiful, young woman. Many princes have desired her hand in marriage.

"But I wanted the man who married my Sita to be a man of great strength and righteousness. To prove his strength, this man would have to lift and string the ancient bow of Shiva. No man has shown the strength to even lift this bow."

The sage turned to Rama and said, "There is a bow belonging to King Janaka that I would like you to string."

Rama entered a long room filled with thousands of people. The bow was so heavy it took no less than five thousand exceptionally strong men to bring the bow and its casing into the room. Several princes who had tried to lift the bow looked on as Rama approached the weapon. Rama looked at Shiva's bow. First he touched it. It was beautiful. Then with no effort whatsoever, he hoisted the bow from its casing and started to string it. As he did so, the bow snapped in two and fell to the palace floor. First there was disbelief, then everyone stood and chanted, "Rama. Rama."

The king rose to his feet and declared, "Sita has found her spouse! Send a messenger to Ayodhya informing them of the wedding of Rama to my daughter, Sita."

The wedding ceremony was held in the palace. As part of this ceremony, the worship of the sacred fire began. The holiest sages recited mantras, prayers.

After this, King Janaka led Sita to Rama. He placed her hand in his and said to Rama, "This is Sita, my daughter, O Rama, who is from today your partner in life. Accept her. Hold her hand in yours. She will always follow you as your shadow."

Rama looked at Sita. He had never seen a more beautiful woman. Sita looked at Rama. She

had never seen a more handsome man.

Following the wedding everyone returned to Ayodhya. All in the city cheered their arrival. Rama and Sita continued to serve their parents and delight the holy ones and gods. Sita and Rama were the perfect husband and wife. They were exceedingly devoted to each other.

Rama's parents watched him mature into a young prince. Rama was a perfectly perfect young man. He had all the noble qualities. He was patient with others' wrongs, but would not do wrong himself. He enjoyed the company of elders and wise men. He was very intelligent and courageous. He was righteous and kind. He was the perfect warrior. He knew when to use violence and when not to. He was healthy, strong and handsome. He was highly learned in the scriptures. Rama was a sat-purusa, the ideal man.

Life In Ayodhya

Now the king was growing older. He noticed omens suggesting his end was near. "I have lived long enough," he thought. "I must be sure my throne goes to Rama, the most worthy of my sons. What a great blessing it would be to see him as king before I go to heaven.

"Then it will be done," Dasaratha concluded, "I shall step down and Rama shall be made king."

The king told everyone about his decision. He informed the priests to begin the sacred rites that would allow Rama to assume the throne of Ayodhya.

Kaikeyi, the last and youngest of the king's three wives, had heard of the decision to make Rama king while Dasaratha was still living. This decision pleased her.

But Manthara, a maid-servant, did not want Rama to be king. If she could somehow convince Kaikeyi to change the king's mind, her position at the palace would be secure.

That evening, she spoke to Kaikeyi in secret. "If Rama takes the throne, you would lose all your control over the king. If Rama is crowned, his mother will control of the kingdom Your rule will come to an end. Awake. Act now. You must convince Dasaratha that it is your son who should be king."

Kaikeyi believed Manthara. She decided to see Dasaratha.

She tried everything to convince Dasaratha to listen to her.

"Dasaratha," Kaikeyi began, "Do you remember that fateful day I saved your life in battle? Do you remember how I stopped your runaway chariot. "

"Yes," replied the king.

"And do you remember what you said after I saved your life?"

Without waiting for an answer, she said, " Oh my powerful king and beloved husband you promised me two boons. Hear my boons now so that they may be granted."

The king reluctantly listened to his wife's requests.

"First," she began. "I wish to have my son, Bharata, placed upon the throne of Ayodhya. Second, I want Rama banished from the kingdom for a period of no less than fourteen years."

The king fell to his knees and begged his young wife not to hold him to these dreadful wishes.

As a righteous and honest man, he knew he could not go back on his word. Yet, he couldn't bear to ask Rama to forsake the throne and go away for fourteen years. He turned pale and speechless.

Kaikeyi told Rama the terrible news. Rather than argue, Rama comforted his father.

"Father, your word is law. I shall do whatever you bid. It is the sacred duty of a son to respect his father."

Then, he turned to his own mother Kausalya, and requested "Please be sure that father installs Bharata as crown prince."

Rama knelt and touched the feet of his parents respectfully. He stood, turned and left the palace.

Lakshmana declared, "I shall destroy anyone who opposes your right to the throne.."

Rama responded, "No, Lakshmana. You know it is my sacred duty, my dharma, to fulfill these wishes."

"My brother, if you must leave Ayodhya, then I shall follow you," Lakshmana said.

Rama tried to convince Sita to remain, but she said sobbing, "And, it is my duty, my dharma, as a wife to be at your side. How can I live without you? I must join you."

Rama tried hard to convince them to stay but they were insistent.

"Then, Sita, come with me," Rama said.

Rama also gave his brother permission to join them.

As the three left the palace, they cast away their royal robes and put on the clothes of

hermits.

The people of Ayodhya wept as Rama, Sita and Lakshmana passed from the city. As the chariot went from sight, Dasaratha cried, "Rama! Rama! Do not leave me."

In time, Dasaratha lost the will to live. His heart simply gave out. Ayodhya mourned the loss of their king.

In a few days, Rama, Lakshmana and Sita crossed the river Ganges searching for a land undisturbed and isolated from everyone.

Soon they reached Chitrakoot, a beautiful place with many trees and streams. It was paradise. They built a small hut near a stream.

Several days had passed. Lakshmana, while hunting in the forest, heard the pounding of a thousand hooves. He climbed a tree to see whose army was approaching. To his amazement, he saw the lead horseman carrying the flag of Ayodhya. Bharata had found his brothers. Lakshmana was sure that his brother had come to kill them.

Lakshmana called to Rama: "A great army is approaching led by our brother, Bharata. I will kill him with my own hands."

"Don't be a fool," Rama said. "He is our brother and he is the king. We must welcome him."

Bharata embraced his brothers. He cried, "My heart is filled with grief and shame. Grief for the loss of our noble father. Shame for being offered the throne that you rightfully deserve. Come back to Ayodhya and be our king."

"That cannot be done," Rama said. "I gave my word and I shall stay here for fourteen years and no less. Then and only then will I return."

Nothing could sway Rama.

"Rama, my brother," Bharata declared, "as long as you are in exile, no one shall be king. To ensure this give me your sandals. I will place them on the throne. For the next fourteen years I will serve our land in your name. And, if after those fourteen years, you do not return, I shall walk into a fire and die."

Bharata took the sandals, mounted his horse and left the forest. In Kosala, Bharata put Rama's sandals on the red and gold Ayodhya throne.

The Forest Life

Several days passed. Rama, Lakshmana and Sita walked south until they came upon

Dandaka forest. Once a beautiful place, Dandaka was now a barren wasteland. Shreds of bark from dead trees littered the ground. Stumps of trees were all that remained of a once lush forest. The sound of the wind seemed to warn anyone who approached. At night demons prowled the land in search of flesh.

Religious men who gave up all worldly comforts and became hermits also lived in the forest. They spoke of the horrors that Ravana's demons had done. Rama and Lakshmana promised they would kill all these demons.

After ten years, Rama, Lakshmana and Sita crossed the Godavari River and reached Panchavati. Here was a magnificent forest, untouched by demons. The air was fragrant with the smell of flowers. Fruit grew on every vine. Birds sang joyfully.

"Let us build a hut here." Rama said.

Nearby lived the ancient vulture king, Jatayu. Jatayu made friends with them and enjoyed guarding Sita while the brothers hunted.

Just beyond the clearing lived Shurpanakha, the she-demon. She was Ravana's sister. She had a pot belly, huge ears, claws on her fingers and toes, slits for eyes, and dirty hair.

One day she saw Rama in the forest. She put down the bone she was gnawing on and said, "I want him for my husband."

Using her magical powers, she turned herself into a beautiful maiden.

She asked Rama, "Why does such a strong, handsome man like you live in this forest? Who are you?"

Rama told her his story. Upon seeing Sita, the she-demon said, "That woman is not good enough for you."

Rama responded, "And who, might I ask, is?"

"I am. I can make you happy."

"Perhaps I should introduce you to my brother, Lakshmana,"

Rama said half-jokingly.

Sensing that Rama was not interested in her, the demon grew angry. She assumed her original form and jumped on Sita. In an instant, Lakshmana took his gold-handled knife from his belt and cut off the she-demon's nose and ears. She howled in pain as she fled.

Shurpanaka ran until she met her brothers Khar and Dushan who lived on the edge of the forest. Seeing his sister's bloodied face, Khar cried, "Who has done this to you?"

His wounded sister whimpered, "A human."

"A human!" Khar replied, "What human can do this?

Take us to them. We will kill them."

Khar gathered his army of demon warriors and marched into the forest.

Lakshmana noticed the sky growing darker. Day seemed to turn into night. Then he looked again. The sky was filled with flying demons. Upon seeing this, Rama told Sita to remain in the hut. With Lakshmana at his side, Rama would face Khar's forces. Rama fired his golden arrows skyward. With each shot, mortally wounded demons fell to earth.

The fierce battle continued. No magic or weapons could save the demons from Rama's divine weaponry. In the end, Khar and his 14,000 warriors were slain.

Shurpanakha watched in horror as her brothers and their army were destroyed. She hurried to Lanka to see her brother, Ravana.

"Oh, Ravana. Khar and Dushan have been killed by humans. All their warriors are dead, too," Shurpanakha cried.

Ravana rose from his throne. The crowns on his ten heads glistened. He raised his ten left arms pointing to his disfigured sister and said, "And how many thousands of humans fought so well?"

"There are but two, my lord." answered Shurpanakha weeping.

"Two!" roared Ravana, his voice echoing through the palace.

"The two banished princes from Ayodhya. They have done this alone," his sister said.

"What gods are on their side?" Ravana wondered.

"One more thing," Shurpanakha added. "Rama's wife, Sita, is the most beautiful woman I have ever seen. She would make a lovely queen."

"Sita," said Ravana.

"Whoever Sita embraces as her husband will outgain the gods in happiness," she added.

"Perhaps there is a way to revenge my sister's wounds and avenge the loss of my two brothers," Ravana thought. "Maybe I can punish Rama in a way he will never expect."

Ravana summoned his magic chariot and flew off. Over the vast ocean and great mountains he travelled until he landed at the den of Mareech, the magician. This magician

was able to assume the form of any human or beast.

Ravana told Mareecha about Rama. He also spoke of his desire to take Sita from the forest, carry her back to Lanka and make her his queen.

I shall do whatever I can to help," said the magician.

He continued. "I will go to the Chilrakoot forest where I shall change into a golden deer and stand near their hut. I will lure Rama away. You will do the rest."

The next day, a beautiful deer appeared at the stream in Panchavati. Sita was enchanted by it.

"Please capture that deer for me," Sita asked Rama.

Lakshmana looked carefully at the creature. He told his brother, "This deer is too beautiful. It is too perfect. I have never seen a deer like that before. Brother, approach it with caution."

"Stay with Sita, " Rama told Lakshmana.

"I will, my lord," Lakshmana replied.

No sooner had Rama taken a step toward the deer than it darted into the woods. It was taking Rama farther and farther from the hut. Then deep in the forest, the deer paused. Rama moved closer to it. As he did so, the deer changed into the form of Mareech.

"Lakshmana was right," cried Rama. His heart was filled with fear. He ran as fast as he could.

Then he heard a voice that sounded exactly like his own cry out, "Lakshmana! Help me!"

Rama knew he had been tricked. He hoped his brother would ignore these cries.

"Lakshmana," sighed Sita. "That is your brother, my husband. He is crying for help. You must go to him."

"But Rama told me not to leave your side."

Sita insisted, "You must help him."

"I cannot," replied Lakshmana.

"You cannot? Are you not worried for my husband's safety? How can you just stand there? Do you not help him because he is only your half-brother? Or because he is my husband?"

"Then I shall find him," said Sita.

"No!" said Lakshmana.

"If you do not go after him, Lakshmana, I shall kill myself."

Finally Lakshmana made his decision. Before he left, he drew a circle around the entrance to the hut.

"Sita," he said, "do not step beyond this magical circle. Inside of it you will be safe."

Lakshmana grasped his quiver and ran in the direction of Rama's voice.

From behind a tree, Ravana watched his plan unfold perfectly.

In an instant, he changed himself into a sanyasi, an old wise man, clutching a begging bowl.

Seeing this common sight, and knowing it was her duty to feed the poor, Sita offered the man fruit. Then Ravana noticed the magical circle. He knew that as long she remained within the circle, he could not get her. He had to get Sita outside of it.

"Take this offering," said Sita.

"I am a sanyasi. I cannot enter your home. To accept your gracious offering you must leave your home."

Sita hesitated. She had always helped the poor. How could she ignore this man? Disregarding Lakshmana's warning, Sita stepped beyond the circle.

Then like a tiger springing from high grass, Ravana grabbed Sita and placed her in his chariot.

Sita screamed, but it was too late. The chariot rose into the sky and sped off to Lanka.

As Ravana headed south, Jatayu, the great eagle, saw Sita. Jatayu spread his huge wings and flew up to the chariot. "Free Sita," Jatayu declared "or I shall kill you."

Ravana ignored the threat. Jatayu tore off one of the chariot's railings. He gently removed Sita from the chariot and set her on the earth.

In blind fury, Jatayu attacked tearing off Ravana's arms and heads. Blood spurted from Ravana's mutilated body. As fast as Ravana lost an arm or head, it grew back. Jatayu was growing tired from the fight. Sensing this, Ravana drew his sword and cut off both of Jatayu's wings. The brave bird fell to the ground dying. Sita caressed Jatayu.

She thanked him for trying to save her. In an instant, Ravana pulled Sita back into the

chariot and staggered back to Lanka.

Once in the city, Ravana tried to convince Sita to stay in Lanka and be his queen. But Sita would not listen. She loved only Rama. Hearing this Ravana led Sita out of the palace and into a garden. He guarded her with a hundred demons.

Back in the forest, Lakshmana found Rama unharmed. Terror filled Lakshmana's heart. He, too, had been tricked.

Upon returning to the hut, Rama cried out,"Sita is gone. What will I do?"

Rama knelt down and cried uncontrollably. "What must she be suffering?" he wondered.

Rama gathered his strength. He said, "This act shall not go unpunished. I will slay Ravana and his entire family."

Rama's Stay in Kiskindha

Rama and Lakshmana began their search for Sita. They entered Kiskindha, the kingdom of the monkeys. Kiskindha was located south of Kosala. Soon they came to a mountain where Sugriva lived. He was the ruler of the monkey kingdom. Hanuman, a devoted follower of Sugriva, guarded the entrance to the kingdom. Seeing the brothers approach, he ordered them to halt.

"Who are you?" Hanuman asked.

"I am Rama, the exiled prince of Ayodhya. This is my brother, Lakshmana. We wish to see your king. I am hoping he can help us find my wife, Sita. She was taken by Ravana."

Rama and Lakshmana met Sugriva. They told their story.

Sugriva said, "I, too, am in exile. My brother seized my kingdom and my queen."

Sugriva paused. He thought about Rama's story. Then said. "Help me regain my throne and I will help you find your wife.

One of my people saw Sita being carried off to Lanka. As she passed overhead, she dropped this."

Rama reached out his hand. It was one of Sita's ornaments.

Tears filled Rama's eyes.

Rama and Lakshmana did as they were asked. They defeated Sugriva's brother and won back the throne.

It was now the rainy season. Rama and Lakshmana returned to the forest. They could not begin their search for Sita until the rains stopped in autumn. Rama grew more depressed. The rain seemed to Rama like tears from the gods.

Then when the sun shone upon the land again, Hanuman arrived. Sugriva had fulfilled his promise. The monkey warrior was accompanied by a great monkey army. Hanuman divided his troops into four divisions. Each division would go in search of Sita for one month.

At the end of the month, three of the four divisions returned with no word of Sita's whereabouts. Only Hanuman's division had yet to return.

Hanuman's Prank

One day as Hanuman and his men searched for Sita, they saw a great bird on a mountainside. This bird was the brother of Jatayu. Hanuman told the bird about his search. Then he asked, "Do you know where Sita is?"

"Yes," the bird said, "She is in the Asoka garden near Ravana's palace."

"How do I get to her?" asked Hanuman.

"You must cross a great ocean," the bird said.

Hanuman's army marched to the mighty ocean. There was no way they could cross this great body of water.

"We must return," said one of the monkey warriors. "How can we get to the other side?"

In a loud voice, Hanuman declared, "I will cross this ocean and rescue Sita."

Hanuman prayed for strength. He saw the unhappy image of Rama. Hanuman prayed to Rama. Then incredibly, he began to grow. He grew so huge that the ground began to shake.

With a great cry, "Victory to Rama," Hanuman leapt into the sky.

The monkey army cheered as their leader flew across the great ocean. The gods smiled down on Hanuman as they admired his courage and devotion.

Nothing could stop Hanuman. On the horizon, he could see Lanka. As he approached the city, he changed back to his normal size. Once in Lanka, he set out to find Sita.

Soon he came upon Ravana's palace. He looked in each of the palace gardens, but he could not find Sita. How could he return without Sita or some word of her whereabouts. Then he saw a grove of trees. Beneath one of the trees was the most beautiful woman Hanuman had

ever seen. She was crying and repeating, "Rama, Rama."

"I have found her," Hanuman declared. "Lord Rama will be so happy."

Hanuman looked around. He noticed that Sita was surrounded by many she-demons.

Just as Hanuman was about approach her, he saw Ravana coming. The king of Lanka was sat on the ground next to Sita. He was saying, "Sita, come with me. Come live in my palace. I will make you my queen. You can have anything you wish."

Hanuman hid from view.

Sita spoke: "How dare you speak to me this way. You have kidnapped me. I am Rama's wife, King Janaka's daughter. Rama will come for me. He will rescue me and kill you and all you demons. If you let me go, I will try to spare your life."

Ravana seemed hurt by Sita's words. Anger and sorrow filled Ravana's heart. He knew at that moment he would never have Sita.

"Then you shall remain here," he said as he turned away.

Hanuman did not move a muscle. He waited and waited. The she-demons guarding Sita were getting tired. One by one they fell asleep.

Here was his chance to speak to Sita. Hanuman approached her and knelt at her feet. "Do not fear. I am Hanuman, Rama's servant and messenger. He has sent me to find you. He cries for your return."

"How do I know you are telling me the truth? You may be just another demon in disguise." Sita said.

Hanuman reached into his pocket and removed Rama's ring. "Here," he said, "This should prove that Rama has sent me."

Sita pressed her hands to her face and cried. "I am sorry I doubted you. Go to Rama and tell him where I am. Tell him I will wait for him to save me." Sita gave Hanuman a jewel. "Here. Take this to my lord as proof of my love."

Suddenly the demons awoke. They attacked Hanuman. He killed them with ease.

Hanuman was finally taken to the palace. Ravana ordered him killed.

One of Ravana's wise men reminded the king, "It is not permitted to kill a messenger."

"Then we shall punish him. Set his tail on fire. Let him return home that way," Ravana declared.

As the king's men wrapped Hanuman's tail in cloth to set it on fire he grew it longer and longer. The more they wrapped, the longer Hanuman grew his tail. Finally, Ravana ordered, "Set it on fire!" cried Ravana.

With his long tail on fire, Hanuman flew into the sky. He decided to set the city of Lanka ablaze to punish Ravana. He flew low over the city and set each building, temple, palace and garden on fire. Flames shot high into the sky. As he flew over Asoka garden he made sure Sita was safe. Then before he headed home, he put his tail in the ocean to put out the fire.

The Great War

Hanuman received a great welcome from his warriors. They hurried back to tell Rama the good news. By now Rama had given up all hope of ever seeing Sita alive again. When Rama saw Hanuman returning, he ran to him.

"I pray you have word of Sita."

Without saying a word, Hanuman gave Rama Sita's jewel.

Rama praised Hanuman for his bravery and said, "You have given me reason to live again."

Meanwhile back at Lanka palace, Vibhishana, Ravana's brother, tried to save Sita's life. "Let her go," he said, "so we can save our kingdom from Rama's anger."

Ravana responded angrily, "If I return Sita, I will be ridiculed by all the gods and demons."

Vibhishana warned again, "Do not underestimate Rama's strength. It is said that Rama is an incarnation of Vishnu sent to earth to destroy all that is unholy. With his powers he will destroy Lanka. Why do you tempt such a fate?"

"I fear no one," Ravana roared.

"Then," Vibhishana said, "I can no longer remain in Lanka. Save yourself brother."

"Then go," shouted Ravana. "I have no place in my kingdom for the weak and timid."

Vibhishana left the palace and magically flew to Rama. Arriving at his camp, Vibhishana declared, "I am the brother of Ravana. I tried to convince my brother to return your wife. But he refused and I left Lanka.

I wish to join you and fight at your side."

Rama responded, "Vibhishana, you have rejected evil for good. You are welcomed here."

Now Rama had to make a battle plan. Vibhishana told him that Ravana and his evil son, Indrajit, had great magical powers. His army was made up of millions of demons.

For his honesty and bravery, Rama promised Vibhishana that he would become the new king of Lanka.

Rama stood on the shoreline of the great ocean and spoke to the ocean god. "Hear me," he called. "I am Rama. I have weapons that are beyond imagination. In an instant I can dry your ocean. If you wish to avoid this fate, show me how to reach Lanka."

The ocean said, "Rama, here is Nala, son of the great builder. He will build you a bridge across these waters. I shall support that bridge."

With the help of the monkey army, Nala put up a bridge made of wood, rocks, and stones. Every creature helped in its own way. It took five days to complete the bridge to Lanka.

Rama, Hanuman, and the monkey army crossed the bridge by nightfall. As they crossed into Lanka they shouted, "Victory to Rama!"

Hanuman's army surrounded the city. Rama knew that Sita would soon be safe.

Ravana called for two of his demons. "Change yourselves into monkeys. Move among the monkey army and find out what you can."

The demons entered The camp and Vibhishana recognized them. They were brought to Rama. He decided not to punish them. He said, "Send a message to your king. Tell him that I have come to save my wife and kill him."

Ravana was angered by his inability to learn about Rama's plans. Enraged he called upon one of his demons.

"Make me an exact copy of Rama's head. Then bring it to me," he said.

Ravana took the head to Sita. "O, Sita," he said, "Rama has failed in his attempt to rescue you. His army has been destroyed. That is the end of your hope. The time has come to change your mind and become my queen."

Sita looked at Ravana and said, "I do not believe any of this."

Ravana responded: "I thought you might say that. So I brought the head of your husband, soaked in blood and sand, to prove my words."

Sita collapsed wailing, "Alas, O Rama, you have followed your dharma. But I have been widowed. Widowhood is a terrible tragedy in the life of a woman devoted to dharma. You

came to save me, but you gave your own life.

O Rama you are happy now. You have rejoined your beloved father in heaven. But what shall I do?

O Rama, I am the terrible woman who has brought all this upon you. I pray take me too. Take me with you, my love."

Angered by Sita's devotion to Rama, Ravana stormed from the garden.

When he returned to the palace, he ordered all his troops to march toward the city gates.

For four days both armies stood poised.

On the morning of the fifth day, the great battle began. Each side suffered terrible losses. Blood filled the streets of Lanka. Bodies of fallen warriors were everywhere.

Rama and Lakshmana fought gallantly.

Hanuman was injured in a duel. Vibhishana showed great valor.

Indrajit, Ravana's son, rained poison arrows upon Rama and Lakshmana. So overwhelming was this attack, that the two brothers suffered many wounds. "I shall send both of you to the house of death," cried Indrajit.

Rama and Lakshmana were bleeding heavily, but they fought on.

Indrajit hurled even more powerful weapons at them. Each weapon took a new toll. Rama and Lakshmana fell to the ground unconscious.

Vibhishana prayed to the gods for their safety. "Protect Rama and Lakshmana while they are hurt."

While the monkey warriors stood by grief-stricken, the battle raged on without Rama and Lakshmana. Ravana's demons made themselves invisible and attacked the heart of the monkey army. Ravana's forces were merciless. Thousands were killed by unseen attackers.

Seeing his forces in retreat, Hanuman charged on with a great cry. "Victory to Ram!! Death to Ravana!"

With his remarkable strength, Hanuman smashed the skull of every visible enemy. He challenged any of Ravana's men to advance. Seeing Hanuman's great courage, the monkey-army rallied behind their leader and fought harder.

Ravana's army was losing its advantage. Angered by this news, he decided to join the

battle. He climbed in his chariot and soared above Lanka in search of Rama.

By now Rama and Lakshmana, having regained consciousness but still dazed, returned to the fight. Ravana viewed the battle scene from the clouds. Then he spotted Lakshmana. He aimed his magic bow and fired. The arrow cut through the air and struck Rama's brother in the chest. He collapsed. Hanuman rushed to Lakshmana's side. He gently lifted the wounded prince and carried him to safety.

Just when things were starting to look up for Rama's warriors, Indrajit returned to the battle. He was now invisible. All the monkey soldiers could hear was the mocking laughter of Indrajit as he soared over them. Indrajit's weapons took an enormous toll on the monkeys. By the time he returned to the palace, every monkey was either wounded or killed. Only Rama, Hanuman, and Vibhishana remained standing.

Rama looked upon around and said, "The battle has been lost."

Then in a weakened voice, Jambuvan, one of the leaders of the army, said, "No, Rama. There is still a way we can regain the advantage and defeat Ravana. Tell Hanuman to go to Kailasa Mountain. There he will see a blazing hill of medicinal herbs. Have him bring these herbs back before sunrise and our army will be saved."

Hanuman rose above the earth and flew off with great speed.

When he reached the mountain, he saw the hill that Jambuvan described. But he could not find the herbs. Realizing time was short, he uprooted the entire hill and carried it back to Lanka. Hanuman flew off balancing the hill in one hand.

When he returned to Lanka, the monkey warriors began inhaling the healing air of the herbs. One-by-one, they rose to their feet and regained their strength. Even Lakshmana recovered from his near-mortal wound. Hanuman returned the hill to its original place.

Rama embraced Hanuman and said, "I know no one who shows your valor and devotion."

With that, Hanuman cried out, "Victory to Rama!"

Using all their weapons, Rama, Lakshmana, Vibhishana, and Hanuman finally overpowered Indrajit. Ravana's son had fought long and hard, but now he was dead.

Hearing of his son's death, Ravana decided now was the time to kill Rama and put an end to this bloodshed.

Arming himself with his most powerful weapons, Ravana left Lanka palace. He spotted Rama leading the monkey army toward the city gates. Ravana fired a magic arrow at Rama. Seeing the arrow, Rama split it with his own arrow.

Ravana tried everything to overpower his foe. But each time, Rama had an answer.

The fight lasted two days. Rama could feel his strength leaving him. He turned to one of his sages and said, "My spirit is nearly gone. My arms and legs ache. My heart wants to go on, but my body can no longer respond."

The sage said to Rama: "Listen carefully to this secret. It is the heart of the sun that will bring you victory and the auspiciousness to destroy Ravana. Worship the sun, O Rama. He alone protects all beings. Pray to him."

As Ravana was reloading his weapons, Rama knelt to pray to the sun.

Then the sage said, "Rama, you will this very moment conquer Ravana."

After looking at the sun, Rama felt his strength return. His heart was filled with joy.

Ravana attacked again. Both armies stood by and watched.

Rama reached for his most powerful weapon, the Brahma-missile, to be used only when all else had failed. He took it to his hands. As he did so, the earth shook. All the warriors covered their eyes and fell to the earth.

Rama stood poised. He aimed the weapon at the on-rushing Ravana. He fired. The missile struck Ravana's chest and exploded. Ravana fell dead.

"Victory to Rama!" shouted his men.

The gods praised Rama. The earth became steady once more. The wind blew softly. The sun shone brighter than ever. Vibhishana knelt at the body of his dead brother and burst into tears. "Why didn't you listen to my words? Why were you so overcome with Sita and power?"

Rama touched Vibhishana's shoulder and said, "Our ancients say that you should not mourn a mighty fallen warrior on the battlefield. Victory is the monopoly of none. Weep not for one who is no more. Rise, for we still have work to do."

Vibhishana prepared the funeral rites for his brother. "My brother was so evil, people will try to keep me from giving him an honorable funeral."

Rama replied, "No one will stop this rite. Hostility ends with death. He is your brother and he is mine too. You must honor him with this rite."

Following the funeral rite, Rama made Vibhishana the new king of Lanka.

Vibhishana's wife and maidens took Sita from the garden. A beautiful sari was placed around her. Jewels made her sparkle. A scarlet spot adorned her forehead.

Sita could not wait to see her victorious husband.

Rama entered the palace and Sita bowed at his feet. He felt both love and sorrow for his wife. "We shall return to Ayodhya," he said.

Period After Coronation

Once back in Ayodhya, Rama seemed troubled. Many people in the city expressed doubt about Sita's faithfulness while in Lanka.

One day a messenger came to Rama and said, "I fear that the people of our kingdom have lost faith in your wife's virtue. Ravana, they say, made her unfit to be your queen. Even the lowest men whisper, 'How can Rama forget that Sita lived with another man?"

Rama stood at the window of his room and looked out upon Ayodhya. Sorrow filled his heart.

Lakshmana came to see his brother. Rama turned to him and asked, "What is a king? Kings cannot be blamed or ridiculed. They are above all other men. They are beyond doubt."

"I know of what you speak of, " his brother replied. "I have heard the ugly rumors and lies."

"I have tried to think of a way to deal with this problem. I cannot rule Ayodhya and not have my people respect my queen. Therefore, with great sorrow and resolve, I have made a decision. Before dawn tomorrow you and Sumantra will take Sita back to the forest. Leave her there and return."

"But she will die."

"This is the nature of the world," Rama said. "This is what I must do."

Lakshmana said sadly, "The dharma law is difficult to know and sometimes more difficult to follow. This act is wrong. There is no way that Sita would ever have disobeyed you or done what the people say. I know this in my heart."

"Do as I say, my brother."

Before sunrise, Ayodhya was shroudded in dense fog. It semed as if the sun refused to show itself this fateful day.

Sumantra, Lakshmana and Sita crossed the river in a small fishing boat. Lakshmana sat at Sita's side. Sita could see him crying.

"What is wrong?" she asked.

"My brother, your husband has listened too long and too well to the words of the people of Ayodhya. They say you were unfaithful to Rama. And to avoid any more disgrace, our king has ask me to escort you back to the forest."

Sita turned to Sumantra. "Do not look for reason here," he said. "This act is beyond men's knowing. Rama will live alone from this day forth."

"Why must this be so?" cried Sita.

Sumantra continued: "All the universe is a sign to be read rightly. War and peace, love and separation are hidden gateways we must pass to get to other worlds. Let us not grow old thinking that truth is what most people see or say it is.

Sita, you will get back to Rama only by entering this forest. This world is like a breath on a mirror. It does not last. Have patience."

Sumantra and Lakshmana returned Sita to the forest.

Sita smiled and said, "Good-bye, Sumantra. You have touched my heart with your wise words and given me new hope. Good-bye Lakshmana, my brother-in-law. Be well."

Sita stood on the river bank as Sumantra and Lakshmana's boat crossed the glistening river. Then she heard the soft voice of the river goddess say, "Let life go, Sita. Do not outlive life. Come home. Come home. Dive into me."

Sita was about to step into the river when she heard the voice of an old man.

"Do not enter the river," he said.

Sita looked at the shaggy old man and asked, "Who are you?"

"I am Valmiki, a poet and a hermit. I live in this forest. Make my home yours."

He led Sita to his home in the forest.

There Sita gave birth to Rama's twins sons, Kusa and Lava. For the next twelve years she and her sons lived with Valmiki.

During that time, Valmiki composed a poem called the Ramayana. When he finished it, he taught the poem to the boys line-by-line. He taught them how to sing the poem while playing the flute and drum.

The boys learned well.

In Ayodhya, King Rama decided to hold a great public festival. He invited everyone in the kngdom to take part. There would be music, story-telling and singing.

Kusa and Lava came to Ayodhya to recite what Valmiki called the earth's first poem.

On the first day of the festival, the boys began singing the story. Rama heard about this wonderful poem and came to see it performed. After hearing only a few lines, Rama asked, "What is this beautiful song called?"

"Ramayana," said Kusa.

Rama looked at the twins. His heart ached with emotion. "These are my sons!" he declared.

He sent a messenger to find Sita and convince her to return to Ayodhya.

The next day Sita returned. She was dressed in bright gold and scarlet. Rama was overjoyed.

Sita approached Rama and said, "Let me prove my innocence before you once and for all."

"I give you permission," Rama replied.

Then Sita took a step back and said, "Mother earth, if I have been faithful to my husband, take me home."

The earth rumbled. The ground rolled and moved beneath Sita. With a great noise the ground opened and took Sita back. The earth shook again and closed.

For that moment, everywhere in the whole universe, there was harmony.

"I will never see Sita again as long as I live on earth," Rama said.

"It is a brief life given to us."

Rama ruled Ayodhya for a thousand years.

One day Rama he thought, "Where is my life? And where am I?

I want to go home now. I was born of the god, Vishnu, and it is time for me to return to him."

Rama left the palace and entered the crowded street of Ayodhya. Everyone stood quietly as their king passed.

Rama continued walking until he reached the banks of the Sarayu.

He touched its water with his feet. All the gods looked down on him. Even Brahma, the creator, came in person to see Rama.

He spoke to Rama: "Come, O Vishnu, join your brothers, Lakshmana, Satrughna, and Bharata. Return to Vishnu. Return to heaven."

With Brahma's words, Rama smiled and stepped into the river. All of Rama's followers entered the river after him and all went to heaven. Rama was home.

The Ramayana was loved and praised by all. The gods were pleased.

Lava and Kusa traveled throughout India singing Valmiki's glorious poem about their father.

Wherever they went they said, "Men who listen to the Ramayana will live a long life. They will be free of sins and will have many sons. Women who listen to the Ramayana will be blessed with children like Rama and his brothers. All those who listen please Rama. Such is the glory of this story. May all who recite it or listen to it regularly find increased love, wisdom, and strength."

Image and Map Gallery

image from:"Angkor et dix siecles d'art khmer"
http://www.worldnet.net/~plegac/articles/angkor/Angkor.html

Ramayan Paintings from Mithila

Traditional paintings by women of Mithila in Bihar State from the private slide collection of Susan Wadley, Syracuse University

1. **Painter 1 (38k)**
2. **Painter 2 (26k)**
3. **Painter 3 (29k)**
4. **Ram, Sita, Laksman and the boatman (36k)**
5. **The golden deer (38k)**
6. **Ram chases the deer (30k)**
7. **Ravana kidnaps Sita (33k)**

Ramayana "God Posters"

Images of Hindu gods in the style of popular Indian posters and calendars, downloaded from Spiritweb image gallery of vedic deities,
http://www.spiritweb.org/Spirit/image-gallery-vedicdeity.html

1. **Rama's rule--Ramraj (83k)**
2. **Hanuman and Ram (54k**
3. **Hanuman carries Rama and Laksman (74k)**
4. **Hanuman brings the mountain of magic herbs (63k)**
5. **Hanuman opens his heart to prove devotion (51k)**

Rama Lila images

Photographs of from the Ramalila festival performance in Benares from the personal slide collection of Linda Hess

1. **Boy actor portraying Ram (17k)**
2. **Boy actor portraying Laksman (21k)**
3. **Preparing Ram and Laksman (23k)**
4. **Elephant in parade (29k)**
5. **Devotees and audience (26k)**

Indonesian Shadow Puppets

Traditional puppets from the collection of Tamara and the Shadow Puppet Theater of Java

1. **Garuda with Rama and Sita**
2. **Hanuman and Sita**
3. **Kumbakarna**
4. **Angry Krishna**
5. **Monkeys Building Bridge to Lanka**
6. **Rama and Sita**
7. **Ravana**
8. **Ravana (close-up)**

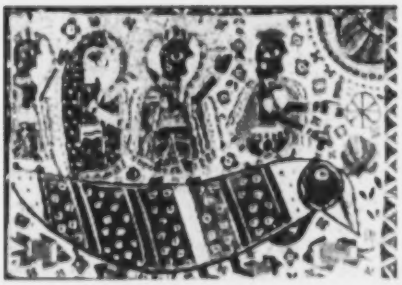
Maps

1. **The Route of Rama**
2. **Popular versions of the Ramayana**
3. **States of Modern India**

Ramayan Paintings from Mithila Painter 1

Ramayan Paintings from Mithila Painter 2

Ramayan Paintings from Mithila Painter 3



Ram, Sita, Laksman and the boatman

The Golden Deer

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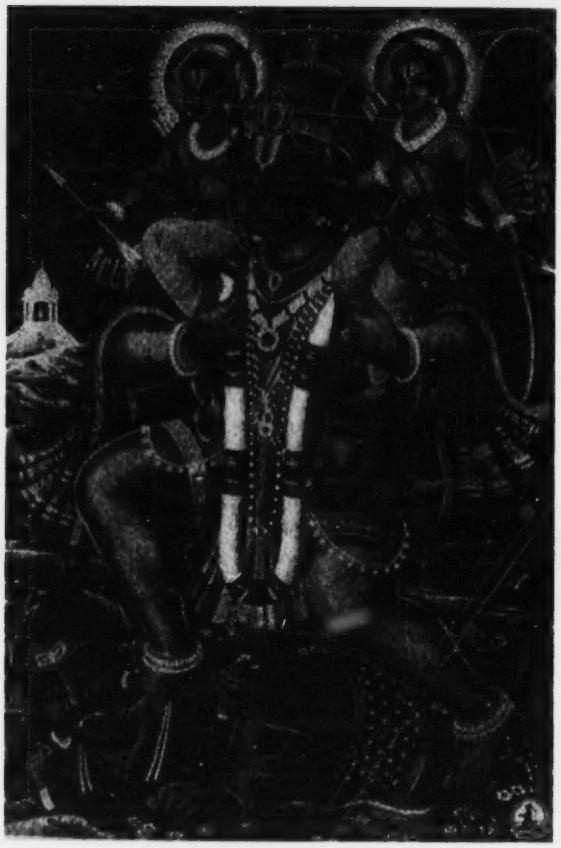
Ram chases the deer

Ravana kidnaps Sitka

Ramayana "God Posters" - Rama's rule--Ramraj



Hanuman and Ram **Hanuman carries Rama and Laksman**

Ramayana "God Posters"

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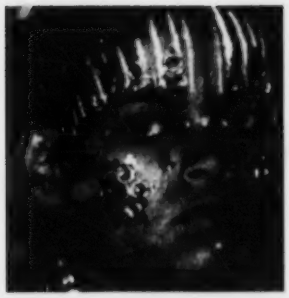
.Hanuman brings the mountain of magic herb

Ramayana "God Posters"

Hanuman opens his heart to prove devotion

Rama Lila images



Boy actor portraying Ram

Boy actor portraying Laksman

Preparing Ram and Laksman

Elephant in Parade

Devotees and Audience

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Garuda with Rama and Sita

Hanuman and Sita

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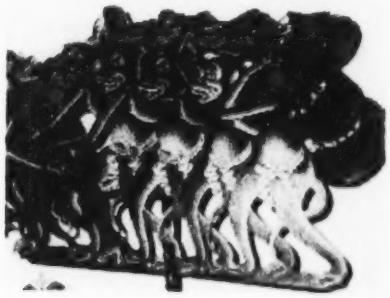
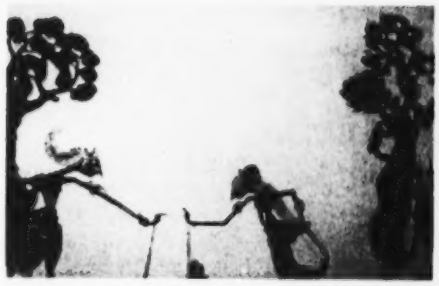
Angry Krishna



Monkeys Building Bridge to Lanka



Rama and Sitka

Ravana

Ravana (Close-up)

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Maps

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JAMMU AND KASHMIR
CHINA
HIMACHAL PRADESH
PAKISTAN
PUNJAB
HARYANA
New Delhi
NEPAL
BHUTAN
ASSAM
NAGALAND
UTTAR PRADESH
RAJASTHAN
MEGHALAYA
TRIPURA
MANIPUR
BIHAR
MIZORAM
WEST BENGAL
INDIA
GUJARAT
MADHYA PRADESH
MYANMAR
Calcutta
ORISSA
MAHARASHTRA
Bombay
ANDHRA PRADESH
KARNATAKA
Madras
TAMIL NADU
KERALA
SRI LANKA

Hinduism

Hinduism embodies a large number of different expressive paths. It has no single founder or single text, and no single administrative authority. Hinduism is one of the oldest and longest lasting religious traditions, with a Hindu written text dating from 1200 B.C.E. The name "Hinduism" comes from sindhu, the Indo-Aryan word for "the sea," and came to apply to the region east of the Indus River.

A set of texts called the Vedas (knowledge) which contain much of the religious beliefs and practices. Composed over many centuries, Hindus believe that the Vedas are "revelations" that were heard, not text composed by people. Amongst the major concepts is dharma, one's duty in this lifetime, and karma, the actions one has performed in previous lifetimes and the actions one performs in this lifetime. Other concepts related to dharma and karma are transmigration of the soul after death, and rebirth of the soul depending upon one's karma in this life. This endless succession of births can be ended by moksa, or salvation, attainable only by a strict practice of liberation from desire and education in the higher forms of knowledge.

In Hinduism exists the trinity of Brahma, the creator, Vishnu the preserver, and Shiva the destroyer and regenerator. Vishnu and Shiva incarnate themselves into other forms, as humans, animals or other living beings on earth to help the beings on earth in times of crisis. Rama, the hero of the Ramayana, is one of the nine major incarnations of Vishnu on this earth. Rama, the son of King Dasaratha, is thought to have been put on earth to conquer Ravana, ruler of Lanka and king of the demons.

Major Deities in the Hindu Pantheon

Agni
Agni is the god of fire who was prominent mostly during the Vedic period. Since fire was the means of sacrifice, Agni was regarded as the mediator between heaven and earth and hence between the gods and humans. He is closely linked with the Vedic god Soma who is a personification of the intoxicating soma plant that is sacrificed to become the drink of immortality. Agni appears in the epic Ramayana when Sita undergoes her trial by fire.

Brahma
Brahma is the first of the so-called Hindu "Trinity". He is the great four-headed god of creation. Although he still maintains a place in Hindu mythology, he no longer has any real importance in Hindu daily worship. His consort is Saraswari, the goddess of wisdom and his vehicle is a goose.

Ganesh
Ganesh is the elephant-headed son of the god Siva and his wife Parvati. He is the patron god of scribes and the remover of obstacles. Because of this latter aspect, invocations are made to Ganesh at the beginning of any undertaking in order to insure its success. In Hindu mythology, there are differing accounts of how Ganesh acquired the head of an elephant. In each of them, however, he is said to have come between Siva and Parvati in some way (usually with sexual

overtones) and was rashly beheaded by his father who promptly replaced his head with that of an elephant's.

Indra

Indra is the example par excellence of a king and warrior-god. He is sometimes referred to as the Hercules of Vedic mythology. His importance reaches a high point near the end of the Vedic period and then begins to decline somewhat. He is well known from one famous battle in which he acquired the title "slayer of Vrtra" since he killed Vrtra, the demon of drought and thereby released the waters that were imprisoned by him. He also appears in several places in the Ramayana epic. In one story, he acquires a thousand eyes (vaginas in some versions) all over his body as a punishment for sleeping with the wife of the holy man Gautama.

Kali

Kali is one of four major Hindu goddesses that each have an association with the god Siva. Besides Kali, these include Parvati, Uma, and Durga. Kali is most frequently portrayed in her terrible blood-drenched form. Around her neck hangs a necklace of human skulls and her tongue hangs out dripping with blood. Around her waist are human hands while she holds a decapitated head. Despite her terrible form, she is adored still today by certain groups of Hindus, especially in the region of Bengal.

Kama

In Sanskrit, the word kama means "desire" and the proper name Kama is used for the Hindu god of love. Kama is often compared to the figure of Cupid from Greco-Roman mythology and in fact there are many interesting similarities between the two figures. The most obvious is his representation as a beautiful youth armed with a bow and arrows. His bow is made of sugar cane, his string from a line of honey bees, and his arrows are each tipped with a flower.

Siva

Siva's name literally means "auspicious" and it is an appropriate description of him. He is often portrayed as a king, yogi, or ascetic in Hindu mythology and art. His importance earns him a place as the third member of the Hindu "trinity" in which he is usually thought of as the god who destroys (recall, Brahma is the Creator and Vishnu the Preserver). Actually, he is one of the more complex images of deity in the Hindu pantheon. His destructive power leads ultimately to good for he removes impurity for the sake of liberation. Like in other places in Hindu religion, we find in Siva the union of opposite principles which make him a representation of the totality of life. He is at the same time creator and destroyer, ascetic and erotic, life-denying and life-affirming, spiritual and material. He combines the Hindu life-stages (asramas) of householder and ascetic. In at least one depiction, he exhibits both male and female qualities. In the West, he is best known in his form as Siva "Nataraj" -- Lord of the Dance -- who dances the world both into and out of existence. Several attributes or associations which are related to Siva are his bull (Nandi), cobra snake, phallus (lingum), trident, matted hair, and tiger-skin loincloth. His wives include Parvati and Sati and his sons are Ganesh (elephant-headed) and Skanda (many-headed).

Vishnu

As the second member of the Hindu "trinity", Vishnu is generally said to be the Preserver or Sustainer of life, especially in his associations with the principles of order, righteousness, and truth (dharma). Every now and then, when these are threatened, he come out of his transcendence in order to restore order. In each case, he takes on an earthly form and becomes incarnated. There are a total of ten incarnations (avatars) of Vishnu. These include a fish, tortoise, man-lion, boar, dwarf, Parasu-Rama, Rama (of Ramayana fame), Krisna, Buddha, and Kalki, who is yet to come. Vishnu is often depicted reclining on a coiled and many-headed cobra which rests on the cosmic waters. Out of his naval blossoms a lotus which hold Brahma, the god of creation whose responsibilities Vishnu has assumed. Beside him is his consort, Lakshmi. In his four hands he holds a conch shell, mace, lotus, and discus.

Lesson Plan: Moral Dilemmas of the Ramayana

Rationale:
his lesson has been designed to accompany a study of the Ramayana . It deals with five episodes within the epic, and it uses these episodes to provide substance for the discussion of Dharma. Students are asked to identify the point at which the character must make a decision which is in conflict with his or her dharma. Once this is done, students may discuss how effective a choice the character has made based on the Hindu concept of dharma and on human nature in general. Students are then asked to relate each dilemma to their own experience.

Objectives:

Students will be able to :

1. understand the concept of Dharma.
2. describe Dharma's effect on major characters in the Ramayana.
3. appreciate the differences in moral reasoning across cultures.
4. examine characters' relationships as they surface in specific scenes and as they relate to the overall work.
5. relate the moral dilemmas of the Ramayana to their own experiences involving similar choices and dynamics.

Procedure:

Begin with the page entitled "Moral Dilemmas: The Role of Dharma." Review with students the importance and meaning of dharma, keeping in mind that dharma changes with each position in society. Have students review the story of the Ramayana and stop prior to each of the five dilemmas:

1. Dasaratha's Choice of a Successor
2. Lakshmana's Loyalty to Rama (Leaving Sita in the Woods)
3. Rama Chooses Sides between Sugreeva and Vali
4. Hanuman Burns Lanka
5. Sita's Ordeal by Fire

As you reach each dilemma, divide the students into groups of three or four, ask them to refer to the section labeled "Defining the Dilemma." Once this is done, have each group review the "Outcomes/Consequences" and "Dharma" sections to gain greater understanding into the difficulty of each decision. Then, refer to the questions at the end of each episode.

Each group should answer all four questions. Then, continue as a class and ask each group to report on their decision.

See the "Extensions" of this lesson for further questions.

The Role of Dharma

Definition

Dharma is defined as 1. good and righteous conduct in performing your life's roles 2. performing your role correctly given a certain situation and time.

Dharma is a major concept in Hindu culture. It is a complex idea of cosmic moral order underlying all existence. Correct actions reinforce this moral order, are acceptable to the gods and bring auspicious consequences. Actions that are not right violate dharma and bring personal, and sometimes cosmic, suffering. Therefore, the moral choice for a Hindu is doubly important. Bad actions (incorrect choices) can not only harm those who make these decisions, but they can actually trigger cosmic tragedies like floods and droughts. Good actions bring cosmic harmony; bad actions bring cosmic suffering.

Introduction

The following five lessons will give substance to the discussion of moral dilemmas in the Ramayana. Each character faces a distinct dilemma in which he must make choices most in line with righteous behavior. The correct choice depends on principles, circumstances, and individual personality. It is not easy to act according to dharma; thus the dilemmas the characters face present thought-provoking problems.

Moral Dilemmas:

Click on one of the following choices to complete each lesson.

1. Dasaratha's Choice

Dasaratha, king of Ayodha and Rama's father, has to choose between a promise he has made to his son or a promise made to his wife.

2. Lakshmana's Loyalty

Lakshmana, brother of Rama, must decide to stay and protect his sister-in-law or to save his brother's life.

3. Rama Chooses Sides

Rama has to decide whether to follow through on a hasty promise to support the younger brother, Sugreeva, against his older brother, Vali, in a battle to the death.

4. Hanuman Burns Lanka

Hanuman, monkey general and devotee to Rama, is faced with the decision to punish the city of Lanka, both the innocent and the guilty, or to flee without harming anyone.

5. Sita's Ordeal by fire

After Sita returns from being held captive in the home of the evil Ravana, Rama must decide whether to accept her back or to put her through a trial by fire to prove her chastity.

Dasaratha's Choice

"'You have promised me the granting of two boons, and you have sworn to it in the name of Rama -- your darling son Rama. And now I'll speak out my mind. If you reject my demand, you will be the first of the Ikshvahu race, proud descendents of the sun god himself, to go back on a promise for the sake of convenience.' She took breath and demanded..." (from Valmiki, trans. R.K. Narayan)

Defining the Dilemma

By design of the Gods, four sons are born to the noble king Dasaratha of Ayodhya. Rama, the hero of the Ramayana , is the son of the king's first wife Kausalya, the twins Lakshmana and Satrughua are the sons of his second wife Sumitra, and Bharata is the son of his third wife Kaikeyi. After coming of age, Rama and Lakshmana are taken away from the palace by the sage Visvamitra. Rama is taught the arts of war, slays demons that have been threatening the forests and wins the hand of Sita, princess of Mithila, by lifting, stringing, and breaking the sacred bow.

Rama, Sita, and Rama's brothers live contentedly in the kingdom of Ayodhya for 12 years until Dasaratha decides that it is time for him to give up the crown. Dasaratha tells Rama that he will become the heir, and he makes arrangements for the rituals and festivities that will celebrate the passing of the crown. The evening before the coronation of Rama is to take place, Dasaratha's third wife, Kaikeyi, reminds the king that he had promised her two boons when she had earlier saved his life in battle. She claimed these boons now. One boon was that her son, Bharata, would be crowned king instead of Rama; the other was that Rama would be exiled from the kingdom for fourteen years.

Within the terms of his culture, Dasaratha faces a difficult dilemma. On the one hand, it is customary for the eldest son to inherit rule from his father and Dasaratha had publicly proclaimed to all Ayodhya that Rama was to be the his heir. On the other hand, Dasaratha is bound by the boons he promised Kaikeyi when she saved his life on the battlefield.

Outcomes/Consequences

Dasaratha must consider the consequences of his decision in terms of satisfying dharma and in terms of the good of Ayodhya. If he chooses to continue with his plan to have Rama king, he is breaking his oath to Kaikeyi. This violates the rule of dharma that demands absolute loyalty to oaths and may bring cosmic punishment. He will also loose the love of his favorite wife, Kaikeyi, and his family life, which is supposed to be the model for his citizens.

If, on the other hand, he makes Kaikeyi's son, Bharata, king, he breaks his promise to Rama and violates the accepted custom of primogeniture.

Questions

1. Which decision do you think would be most in line with dharma?

2. Which decision do you think would be most in line with what you know of Dasaratha?

Continuing with the story, we know that Dasaratha chose to grant Kaikeyi her boons, thus proclaiming Bharata the king and sending Rama into exile.

1. Do you think that his decision was the most moral one?

2. Why or why not? (What is the principle or bit of overwhelming evidence that persuaded you to answer in the way you did?)

3. What decision would you have made under the same circumstances?

4. What would have been the reason (s) for your decision?

5. What choices that you have made, or have seen others make have been similar?

Lakshmana's Loyalty

"Lakshmana responds to Sita's plight by stating, 'No need for you to harm yourself. Only I shudder at the import of your words. I'll obey you now. Do not be anxious. This very second I'll leave. I only hesitated because your order goes against the command of my brother. I'll go, and may the gods protect you from harm. If I don't go, she will kill herself... if I go, she will be in danger. I'd rather be dead than facing such a dilemma...I'll go and what is destined will happen. Dharma alone should protect her." (from Valmiki, trans. R.K. Narayan)

Defining dilemma

After Sita, Rama and Lakshmana are sent into exile, and Soorpanaka has been humiliated, Ravana (Soorpanaka's brother and king of Lanka) declares revenge. He not only wants to see Rama and Lakshmana destroyed, he desires Sita to be his consort. He decides to consult with Mareecha, his uncle, who now lives as an ascetic in the woods. Mareecha had previously tried to kill Rama to avenge his mother's death, therefore Ravana thinks him to be knowledgeable on this subject. After some provoking, Mareecha agrees to assume the figure of a golden deer and to try to lure Sita from her guardians. Once Sita spots the golden deer, her heart is set on it. She begs Rama to bring it to her, and is terribly unhappy until he agrees to try.

Lakshmana warns Rama not to fetch the golden deer that Sita desires. Rama ignores his brother's plea and goes any way, making Lakshmana the guardian of Sita. Mareecha, after being mortally wounded by Rama's arrow, calls for help in a voice disguised as Rama's. Upon hearing this voice calling for help, Sita pleads with her brother-in-law to save him. When Lakshmana explains that this is a trick, Sita tells him that she will throw herself into a fire and die if he does not help Rama.

Lakshmana is in a dilemma. He has sworn to protect his sister-in-law, yet he must help his brother as well. When Lakshmana decides to leave Sita to try to help his brother, Sita is captured by Ravana.

Outcomes/Consequences

If Lakshmana goes to the aid of his brother, he is forsaking his duty to guard Sita. Yet, Sita swears that she will kill herself if he does not go.

Dharma

Lakshmana's dharma as a younger brother is to follow what his elder brother orders him to do. An earlier example of this is represented when Lakshmana leaves his wife and beloved city behind to follow his elder brother into exile. Lakshmana's dharma as a brother-in-law is to follow the wishes of his sister-in-law (who becomes as a mother figure to him after the marriage ceremony) and to protect her from harm.

Questions:

1. In a situation like this one, assuming that you do not have an omniscient point of view, which decision seems to be the best one?

2. According to Lakshmana's dharma, which choice would have made the most sense?

3. Is Lakshmana's decision correct according to his dharma?

4. Does this remind you of a situation you have been in, read about or seen?

Rama Chooses to Ally with Sugreeva

"Lakshmana had his misgivings. 'I am not certain whether Sugreeva is trying to involve you in anything more than an ordinary combat between monkeys. I do not know if we should participate in this struggle at all. How can you trust as an ally one who has not hesitated to intrigue fatally against a brother?'" (from Valmiki, trans. R.K. Narayan)

Defining the Dilemma

After Ravana has captured Sita, Rama desperately searches for a way to save her. As he is traveling in the kingdom of Kishkindha, he comes upon Sugreeva, a deposed king of the monkey kingdom, and Hanuman, his general. Sugreeva explains to Rama that he has been deposed by his ruthless brother, Vali, who has captured his wife and imprisoned his friends. Now, alone and afraid, Sugreeva has been tormented by his brother and the various vanaras that he has sent to kill him. Hanuman ass Éures Rama that Sugreeva is telling the truth. When Sugreeva shows compassion for Rama's loss of his wife, Rama promises to help him defeat his brother. After this promise is made, Sugreeva continues to explain how he had been deposed by his brother. It seems that Vali, his elder brother, was king when a demon threatened his kingdom. Vali left the palace with Sugreeva at his side, in pursuit of the demon. Realizing that Vali was a formidable opponent, the demon hid in a cave to try to escape the mighty Vali. At this point, Sugreeva was asked to promise his brother to stay by the door of the cave so that Vali could enter the cave, kill the demon, and return to the palace. Sugreeva waited a year, and, when Vali did not return, he assumed that his brother had died. He placed a large bolder in front of the door of the cave and returned to the palace where he took over the throne and ruled as king. Vali was not dead, however. When he returned, he was angry with his brother for leaving the cave and for usurping his power. He banished him from the kingdom, took Sugreeva's wife for his own, and placed all of Sugreeva's ministers in prison. Sugreeva lives in exile, living in constant fear of his mighty brother's wrath. Full of confidence for acquiring his new ally, Sugreeva enters the battle with Vali. Vali appears invincible. As Rama watches from behind a tree, Sugreeva pleads with him for assistance. Rama instructs him to wear a garland of flowers around his neck while fighting Vali because they look so much alike to him. Sugreeva returns to the battle and is eventually overcome by Vali's strength. As Vali holds Sugreeva's neck in his clutches, the younger brother makes a last plea to Rama to save him. Rama shoots his arrow from behind the tree, killing Vali. Sugreeva is returned to the throne, and his army joins Rama's cause.

Outcomes / Consequences

Rama has promised to fight on the side of Sugreeva, but he did so before he knew all of the details of Sugreeva's exile. If he kills Vali, he could be accused of interfering in an affair between brothers. Sugreeva may not in fact be on the side of righteousness in this scenario, for he has violated his dharma by usurping power from his brother who was still alive and depending on him to be waiting outside the cave. Vali is a powerful figure, and he has been given a boon by the gods which allows him to drain half the power from his opponents and use it against them. Rama's success in this battle is not guaranteed.

If Rama chooses not to kill Vali, he will have broken a promise to a friend. Rama needs a powerful army to help rescue his missing wife. An alliance with Sugreeva and helping him recapture the throne, would place Sugreeva's powerful army at Rama's disposal, including the resourceful general, Hanuman.

Dharma

- According to the rules of dharma, a warrior must first declare himself an enemy of his opponent before entering into battle. Secondly, a warrior's attack must never take place in secret (Rama attacked Vali from a hidden spot behind a tree). Vali, having heard a rumor of Rama's alliance with Sugreeva, tells his wife that Rama is too noble a warrior to enter into this fight without declaring himself.

- Vali had committed a sin against his own dharma by capturing his brother's wife and keeping her as his own.

- According to the dharma of a king, one may settle disputes within one's territory, even if the disputes exist between brothers, and a king may punish within his own kingdom any one of his subjects who has committed a breach of dharma; however, Rama is not the king of Vali's territory.

- A king's dharma includes the power to punish, so long as the punishment is just. Unjust punishments could result in the destruction of the king and his family (Rama and Vali are both kings).

- As a warrior, Rama is entitled by dharma to hunt forest creatures (Vali is a monkey).

Questions

1. Is Rama's action correct according to Dharma?

2. Is his decision to ally himself with Sugreeva realistic according to human nature?

3. What would you have chosen to do if faced with Rama's dilemma?

4. What situations have you experienced, or are you aware of, that parallel those in this scene of the Ramayana?

Hanuman Burns Lanka

"Hearing Hanuman's faithful narrative, Rama, full of joy, said: 'The mission that Hanuman had carried out is of great significance an the most arduous in the world... Who is able to capture that citadel by assault, that has been rendered inaccessible by its rampart of titans, but one whose courage and valour are equal to Hanuman's? Hanuman has carried out this important service for Sugreeva by manifesting a strength equal to his audacity. That servant to whom his master confides a difficult task and who acquits himself with zeal is said to be a superior man. The one who is ready and capable but who yet does no more than himself agreeable, is called an ordinary man, but he who is well and able and does not carry out the command of his king, is said to be the least of men. Hanuman has fulfilled the task confided to him unfalteringly.... Yet even so my heart is heavy, since I am unable to requite the bearer of these good tidings in fitting manner.'" (from Valmiki, trans. Hari Prasad Shastri)

Defining the Dilemma

Hanuman, emissary and loyal servant to Rama, finds Sita imprisoned in Ravana's palace, assures her that help is on the way, and, in turn, is captured by Ravana's demon soldiers. Viewed as a spy, Hanuman who has killed Ravana's younger son Aksa in battle, is delivered to Ravana for retribution. Impressed with Ravana's charm, nobility, heroism, and splendor, Hanuman notes the fact that Ravana is, however, "devoted to unrighteousness." Similarly struck by Hanuman's "majesty of appearance and strength," Ravana attempts to ascertain the purpose of Hanuman's visit and his reason for laying "Asoka-grove to waste." Proclaiming that he is a messenger for Sugreeva, Hanuman states that he acted in self defense an pleads with Ravana to restore Sita to Rama or to fall victim to Rama's wrath. Furious at hearing Hanuman's words, Ravana orders Hanuman's death.

Vibhisana, Ravana's brother, intervenes at this point and counsels Ravana to follow the scriptures and exact the appropriate punishment for Hanuman's crime. Ravana "appreciated the counsel and accepted it with intelligence." He chooses, instead, to order his demons to set fire to Hanuman's tail in an effort to show that such mischief is intolerable. Enduring the punishment, Hanuman seizes the opportunity to observe Lanka during the day in an effort to gather military information for the future. Hanuman is "intrigued" that the fire does not burn or hurt him and concludes that it is Sita's grace and Rama's glory that prevent injury to him. Hanuman frees himself from his bonds, and with his tail ablaze, flies around Lanka, destroying the town. Pleased with his exploits, the gods and sages sing Hanuman's praises. However, Hanuman begins to fear that his angry actions (for he does act out of anger) may have unwittingly contributed to Sita's death. He discovers that Sita is, in fact safe, and delighted to hear this news, he prepares to return to Rama.

Outcomes / Consequences

- If Hanuman does burn Lanka, does this act effectively dishearten and demoralize Ravana and his army? In what ways does this contribute to the final outcome (with Rama and

Ravana meeting in battle)?

- If Hanuman burns the city, could it perhaps reveal Ravana as an inauspicious character (particularly to his own army).

- If Hanuman does not burn Lanka, could his mission still have been accomplished? Consider the fact that his freedom was not really at issue here.

- If Hanuman escapes the city of Lanka without burning it, would he be deemed less loyal to Rama? Does his burning of Lanka exceed Rama's expectations of loyalty?

Dharma

- Dharma is defined as 1.) good and righteous conduct in performing your life's roles 2.) performing your role correctly given a certain situation and time.
- While Hanuman achieves certain goals in his burning of Lanka, were these the most righteous means to his end?
- Given the situation and time, could Hanuman have opted for other choices that would have been more commendable, and thus more principled?
- Ultimately, in burning Lanka, Hanuman acts out of retaliation (and anger) to counter the retaliation of Ravana and his army. Is this act morally defensible, and is Hanuman fulfilling his dharma in the most fitting way?
- Ravana listens to the advice of his counselors, and in doing so, chooses not to kill Hanuman but instead opts to set his tail afire. What role does dharma play here? Is Ravana's "proper punishment" of Hanuman less vindictive, and does it warrant greater merit than Hanuman's burning of the entire city of Lanka?
- Finally, Rama and Ravana meet on the battlefield. Does Hanuman's prior action significantly contribute to Rama's vanquishing of Ravana? If so, has he (Hanuman) effectively fulfilled his dharma? If not, why not?

Questions

-- Brainstorm and discuss the following questions as they relate to this scene.

1. Is the action correct according to dharma?
2. Is it realistic according to human nature? (Perhaps a discussion of the varying cultural norms in Eastern and Western societies would be appropriate at this time.)
3. What would you have chosen to do in this situation? (Perhaps a role-playing activity could work here, with students expressing their motives through the characters' perspectives.)
4. What situations have you experienced, or are you aware of, that parallel those in this scene of the Ramayana ?

Rama Puts Sita through the Ordeal by Fire

"On hearing this, Sita broke down. 'My trials are not ended yet, ' she cried. 'I thought with your victory all our troubles were at an end... ! So be it.' She beckoned to Lakshmana and ordered, 'Light a fire at once, on this very spot.'" (from Valmiki, trans. R.K. Narayan)

Defining the Dilemma

After Sita is rescued by Hanuman, Rama asks to have her brought to him. She is so happy to at last see him, to be reunited. Rama is very cold to her and speaks cruelly. He tells her and the world he cannot accept her as his wife after she has spent so long in another man's house -- "in Ravana's lap." He tells her the only reason he had Hanuman rescue her was to save his own honor. Sita proclaims her chastity, unswerving devotion, and her innocence and then instructs Lakshmana to light a fire to prove her chastity. She walks into the fire and comes out of it unscathed (the sweat on her brow due to her rage at Rama is still there after the ordeal). The lotus in her hair is still fresh. Rama claims he knew she was innocent all along but wanted her to prove it to the people.

Outcomes / Consequences

Rama must reflect on his true identity -- "Who am I really?" The gods berate him for sending Sita to the fire. Ordeal by fire is more a test for Rama than for Sita; he confronts his own divinity. For Rama to learn to comprehend that he is a god, he must conduct this ordeal.
He is enacting his dharma -- he is upholding the honor of his family -- however, he may be doing the opposite in the eyes of others.

Dharma **

According to dharma, a woman in the house of another man is impure.

Questions

1. What is Rama's correct decision in terms of Dharma?
2. Was it realistic according to human nature?
3. What would you have chosen in this decision?
4. Do you know of other situations that involve similar choices?

Extensions for the Moral Dilemma Lessons

1. Ask students what current or historical issue illustrates the same type of dilemma in each episode.

2. Ask students what comparable piece of literature illustrates similar dilemmas in each episode.
3. If this were to be viewed as a contemporary dilemma, what factors or variables would contribute to the outcome?

Ramayana Glossary

Ayodhya (EYE-'YODE'-YA)- Capital city of Kosala which was ruled by Dasaratha, later by Rama.

Asoka (AH-'SHOW'-KA) - Garden in Lanka where Ravana kept Sita captive.

Avatar (AH-VAH-'TAR') - The incarnation of a god into another form. The incarnation of Vishnu on earth is Rama.

Bharata (BAH-'HRA'-TA)- Son of Queen Kaikeyi and the half brother of Rama.

Boon - A promise or reward

Brahma ('BRAH'-MA) - The creator god of the Hindu triad of gods which includes Shiva and Vishnu.

Chitrakoot (CHEE-TRAH-'KOOT')- A beautiful forest where Rama, Sita and Lakshmana lived.

Dandaka ('DAHN'-DA-KA)- Great forest which Rama, Sita and Lakshmana traveled through for ten years of their exile.

Dasaratha (DAH-SHAH-'RAH'-TA)- King of Kosala and Rama's earthly father

Dharma ('DAR'-MA)- Laws, duties and obligations

Dushan ('DOO-SHUN)- Brother of Ravana and Surpurnakha.

Ganges ('GAHN'-JEEZ)- The river considered sacred by Hindus.

Garuda - (GAH-'ROO'-DA)- King of winged creatures

Godavari (GO-'DAH'-VA-REE)- River Rama, Sita and Lakshmana cross to get to Panchavati.

Hanuman ('HUN'-YOU-MUN)- Monkey warrior who became Rama's devoted friend and servant.

Indrajit (IN-'DRAH'-JIT)- Ravana's favorite son who fought Rama with magical weapons.

Jambuvan ('JAM'-BUH-VAHN)- Leader of the bears who found Sita.

Janaka ('JAH'-NA-KA)- King of Mithila who found Sita in a furrow.

Jatayu (JA-'TIE'-YOO)- The great bird who tried to rescue Sita and was killed by Ravana.

Kaikeyi (KYE-'KAY'-YEE)- Dasaratha's youngest queen and the mother of Bharata. She called for Rama's exile.

Kailasa (KYE-'LAH'-SA)- Mountain where Hanuman found the medicinal herbs.

Kausalya (COW-'SAL'-YA)- Dasaratha's queen and Rama's mother.

Khar (CAR)- Brother of Ravana and Surpurnakha.

Kiskindha (KISH-'KIN'-DA)- The monkey kingdom ruled by Sugriva.

Kosala (KOH-'SAH'-LA)- The kingdom ruled by Dasaratha.
Kush (COOSH)- Sita and Rama's son, twin of Lava.

Lakshmana (LAKS-'SHMA'-NA)- Queen Sumitra's son and devoted half-brother of Rama.

Lanka ('LAHNG'-KA)- Island kingdom ruled by Ravana

Lava ('LAH'-VA)- Sita and Rama's son, twin of Kush.

Lotus ('LOW'-TUSS)- Flower; Hindu symbol of beauty, purity & good fortune

Manthara ('MAHN'-TA-RA)- Maid servant who convinced Kaikeyi to have Rama exiled and make Bharata king.

Mantra ('MAHN'-TRA)- Hindu prayers or incantations.

Mareech (MUH-'REAC'H')- The magician who helped Rav̈ana capture Sita.

Nala ('NAH'-LA)- Son of the great builder who helped Rama construct the bridge to Lanka.

Panchavati (PUN-CHA-'VAH'-TEE)- Rama, Sita and Lakshmana's abode in the forest.

Payasam ('PYE'-EH-SUM)- A mixture of rice pudding, milk and sugar.

Rakshasas ('RAHK'-SHA-SHASS)- Warrior-demons.

Ravana ('RAH'-VA-NA)- King of Lanka who kidnaped Sita and was defeated by Rama.

Sanyasi (SUN-'YAH'-SEE)- A religious man who lives in a forest, a hermit.

Sarayu (SAH-'RYE'-YOO)- The river that runs alongside Ayodhya.

Sari ('SAH'-REE)- A garment of yards of cloth draped to form a skirt and head or shoulder covering.

Sat-purusa (SAHT-POO-'ROO'-SHA)- The ideal Hindu man.

Shiva ('SHIV'-AH)- The deity whose bow Rama lifted to win Sita's hand in marriage.

Surpanakha (SHURE-'PAH'-NAH-KA)- Ravana's demon sister.

Sita ('SEE'-TA)- Daughter of King Janaka, wife of Rama; name literally means "furrow."

Sugriva (SOO-'GREE'-VA)- Monkey king of Kiskindha who helped Rama get Sita back.

Sumantra (SOO-'MAHN'-TRA)- Charioteer of Kosala.

Sumitra (SOO-'MEE'-TRA)- One of Dasaratha's queens and mother of twin sons Shatrughna and Lakshmana.

Tataka ('TAH'-TA-KA)- Demoness who was killed by Rama.

Valmiki (VAHL-'MEE'-KEE)- Poet and author of the Ramayana who helps Sita and her twin sons.

Vasistha (VAH-'SEESH'-TA)- Priest to King Dasaratha.

Vibhishana (VEE-'BEE'SHA-NA) - Ravana's brother who leaves Lanka to join Rama.

Vishnu ('VISH'-NOO)- God who came to earth in the form of Rama to rid the world of demons.

Vishwamitra (VISH-WAH-'MEE'TRA)- Religious man; went to forest with Rama to kill the demons that were bothering him.

The Oral Tradition and the Many "Ramayanas"

by Philip Lutgendorf, Chair, South Asian Studies Program, University of Iowa

Rama is born in countless ways, and there are tens of millions of Ramayanas...

- Tulsidas (16th cent.) Ramcarittnanas 1:33:6

All right (you may be asking at this point), just how many of these things are there, anyway? The title of this curriculum guide speaks reassuringly of "The Ramayana" but later subheadings suggest a kind of textual population explosion, speaking of "many," "a thousand," and finally, "tens of millions." Is this just epic hyperbole, like the myriads of arrows that shoot forth whenever the hero Rama releases his bow? And if not, how are American educators and students supposed to get a handle on a non-Western text and tradition that is (as they say) growing even as we speak?

I've been teaching the Ramayana for years, and (like most of the contributors to this guide) have found that it serves as an excellent window through which to open to American students great vistas of the world of Indian civilization. But I always begin by explaining that "the Ramayana" (in spite of the definitive article) is not a single book like "the Bible" but rather a story and a tradition of storytelling. For more than two millennia, this tradition has enjoyed a unique popularity throughout the subcontinent of South Asia (comprising the modern states of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka) and beyond - for versions of the tale have flourished in Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, and Indonesia. Although the core story of the travails of Prince Rama and Princess Sita and their companions remains much the same everywhere, storytellers and poets in dozens of languages have chosen not simply to translate some "original" version, but instead have retold the saga in their own words, often modifying and embellishing it according to regional traditions or their own insights and interpretations. At the same time, this tale has been continuously recreated orally - with all the fluidity we expect in oral performance - by a whole spectrum of tellers ranging from traditional bards and singers to modern film and video producers (an epic television serialization of the story held Indian audiences spellbound in 1987-89), and also including countless grandmothers. Indeed, for most modern Indians, the "original" Ramayana is as likely to mean a bedtime story heard in childhood as the 2000+ year old Sanskrit epic of the poet-sage Valmiki.

Since the Ramayana is a story, and a charming one at that, students find it relatively easy to get into - even with four syllable foreign names. Like contemporary fantasy fiction and video-gaming, it ushers them into a world of superhuman heroes and hyperbolic deeds, within which a strangely-familiar scenario unfolds: a handsome prince wins a beautiful princess for his

bride, but is deprived of his kingdom by a scheming step-mother and unjustly exiled to the forest, where a wizard-king abducts the prince's wife and imprisons her in a golden island-fortress. The prince then sets out on a daring quest to recover his beloved, aided by talking animals and birds, and ultimately triumphs over his adversary (a villain so egotistical he has sprouted ten heads!) in a cataclysmic battle, to return in triumph and reclaim his throne. This skeletal outline resembles many European folktales, but as students are drawn deeper into the details of its epic plot, they encounter much that is unfamiliar, for the Ramayana encodes many of the cultural values of Hindu civilization: from a cosmology of cyclically-recurring eons, to a stratified social order and a patriarchical, extended-family structure based on arranged marriage, to the overarching theme of Dharma-a central cultural concept suggested by terms like "morality," "duty," "cosmic order," or simply, "the Way." Thus the story can open a portal leading students to encounter with the world-view of a great civilization that both resembles, and markedly differs from, their own and (a process, by the way, which may enable them to realize that they have a world view in the first place.)

The contributions in this guide - the work of educators who have come to value the Ramayana - are designed to help other teachers to facilitate such a cultural encounter by helping them to read "between the lines" of the epic story and to recognize some of the ethical and social values it encodes and the issues it raises. This last point is important, because as a fluid storytelling tradition, the Ramayana doesn't simply provide set answers. It also raises troubling questions that have been pondered and debated by audiences for centuries, and that have resulted, in some cases, in radical reinterpretations of characters and events, or in the creation of such "alternative" retellings as those that give greater prominence to women or that even cast the "villains" as the real such heroes. In this way, it has functioned less as a fixed message than as a kind of language within which South Asian culture thinks about itself, and projects (and argues about) its ideals of the good life and the just society. Since one out of every seven people on earth today lives on the Indian subcontinent, there are literally "tens of millions" of Ramayanas out there - and still others "over here" as well, brought by a prosperous and culturally vibrant group of recent immigrants. Through studying the Ramayana story, you and your students will learn something important about the myriad bearers of this tale, and hopefully about yourselves.

The Story of Ramayana in Bengali Scrolls

One of the regional folk traditions by which the Ramayana is told are scrolls from Bengal. These scrolls of epics and popular stories are slowly adapting to new themes and images, but the examples here are episodes of the Ramayana.

Scroll One

Sita's capture

This scroll, collected in Calcutta in 1980, is an unusual depiction with a red background of Sita's abduction by Ravana.

From the H. Daniel Smith Collection of Indian Art, Acc. No. 1994:158 University Art Collection

Frame 1: Ram, Lakshman and Sita in the forest.

Note that Ram is shown wearing yellow, with a green face.

Lakshman is in blue while Sita wears an auspicious red/rose sari.

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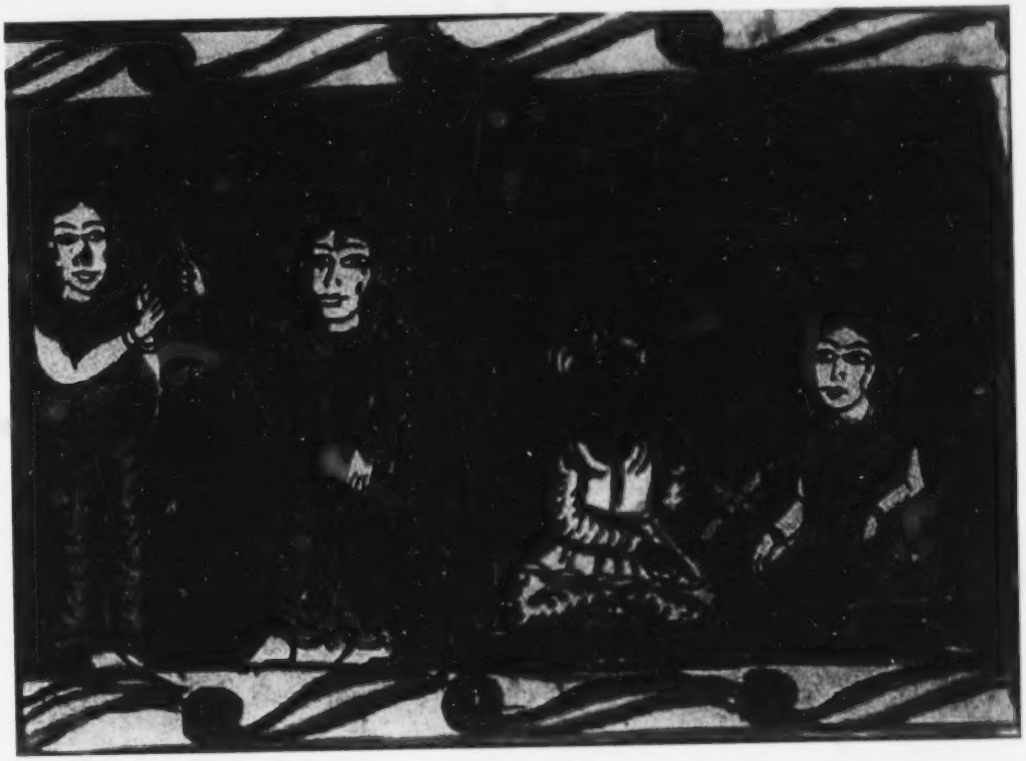
Frame 2: Lakshmana cuts off Shurpanakha's nose while Ram and Sita sit inside the hut.



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Frame 3: Her nose bleeding, Shurpanakha pleads with Ravana to take revenge.

Shurpanakha also describes Sita's beauty and Ravana becomes enraptured with the imagined Sita.

Frame 4: Ravana's uncle takes the form of a beautiful deer.

Sita begs Ram to capture this deer for her.

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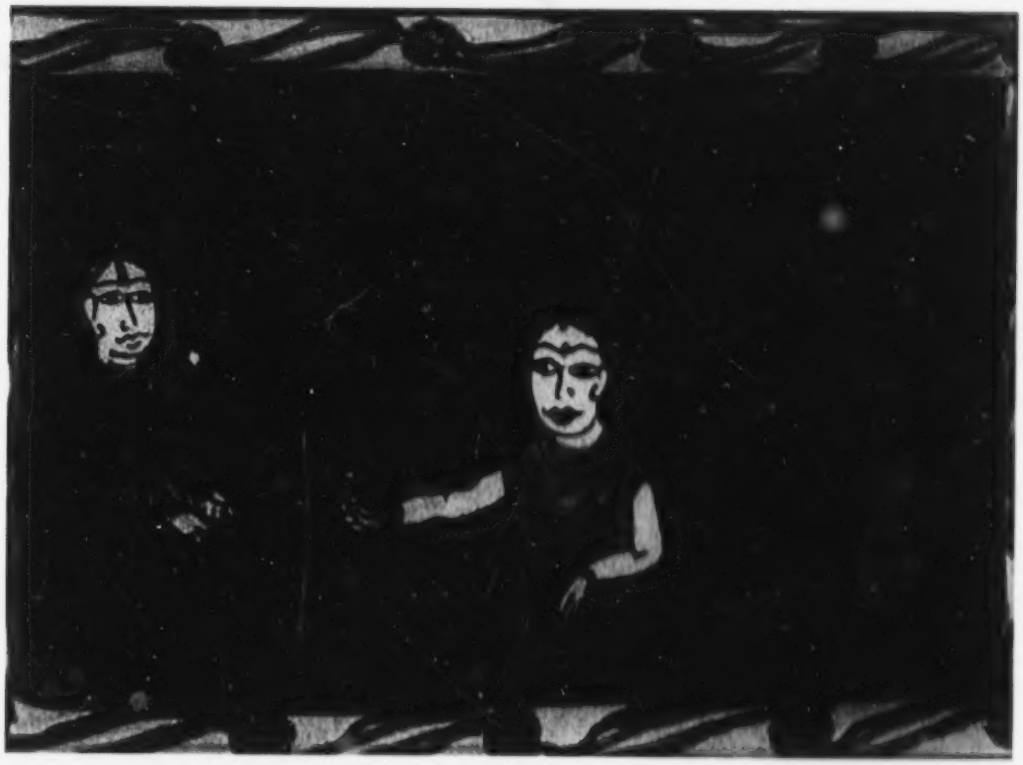
Frame 5: Ram hunts the deer.

When shot, the deer reverts to the form of the demon uncle. Note the way in which time is presented in this image: the deer above representing a moment before the next, where the demon comes back to its original form.

Frame 6: Sita begs Lakshman to seek out Ram.



Having heard the demon call out "Lakshman" in Ram's voice, Sita insists that Lakshman should go and help his brother.

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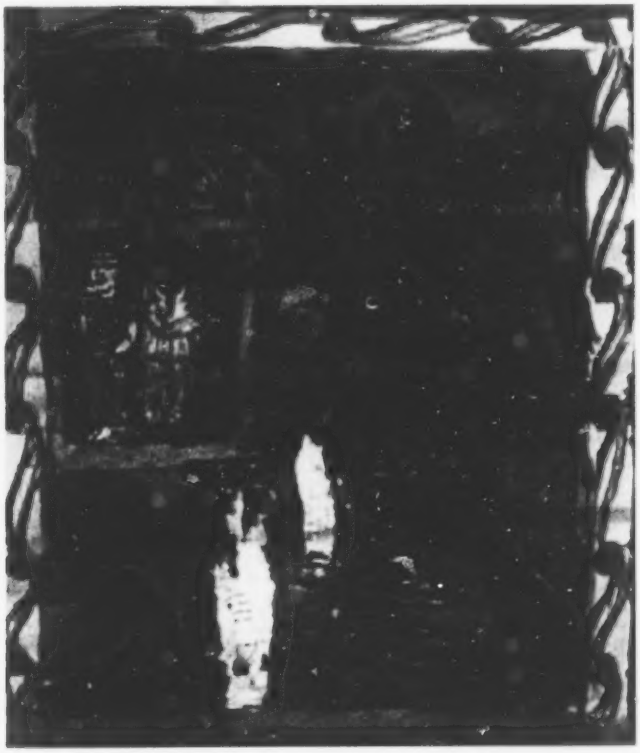
Frame 7: Dressed as a Sadhu, the ten-headed Ravana entices Sita to step out of ther hut and captures her.

Frame 8: The vulture Jatayu attempts to capture the palinquin holding Ravana and Sita, but is unsuccessful.



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2. Bang, Betsy, The Old Woman and the Rice Thief. Greenwillow, 1978 (Grade 1-4)

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4. LIown, Marcia. Once a Mouse. Scribner, 1961 (Grade 1-3)

5. Duff, Maggie. Rum Pum Pum. Macmillan, 1978 (Grade preschool - 3)

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8. Gregor, Arthur. The Little Elephant. Harper and Row (Grade 1-3)

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5. Lye, Keith. Take a Trip to India. Watts, 1982. (Grade 1-3)

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9. Talyarkhan, Natasha. India. Silver Burdett. (Grade 5 and up)

10. Tigwell, Tony. A Family in India. Learner. (Grade 2-5)

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The Ramayana chorus for the classroom

Ramayana Chorus http://www.maxwell.syr.edu/maxpages/special/ramayana/ChorusSong.htm

Useful Websites

The Ancient Indian Homepage - http://www.ancientindia.com
Provides a table of contents which includes Mahabharata, Ramayana, Krishna and Radha, Durga, Ganesha, Hunuman, Shiva, Rama and Lakshman and Sita, Vishnu, and other links to related sites (including an amazing one to "the Hindu universe"). Each entry provides a general overview of the text or god and an image.

The Ramayana Story http://www.askasia.org/image/photos/tabi234.htm
Ten images which tell the story (each is clickable to see a full screen image) with links to 2 lesson plans, "Rama and the Ramayana: Lessons in Dharma" (includes a 10 item summary with images) and "Understanding Karma, Dharma, and Samsara."

Exploring Ancient World Cultures - http://eawc.evansville.edu/inpage.htm
Links to essays, resources, maps/images, www sites, chronology, and quizzes.

Ramayana - http://divali/rama1.htm
Story told through beautiful images and pictures (3 pages). Links to a gallery of related images. Images are rather small.

Inroduction to the Study of Ramayana -
http://www.maxwell.syr.edu/maxpages/special/ramayana/Spot03.htm
A brief synopsis of the genesis of the Spotlight on the Ramayana project.

Ramayana - The Story - http://users.sisna.com/bskene
A beautiful page with colorful pictures, narrating the Ramayana story.

Hindu Gods - http://users.sisna.com/bskene
A brief look at the various Gods of the Hindu pantheon.

Religions of India - http://users.sisna.com/bskene
A colorful documentation of the many religions that exist in India.

Cooking for the Gods http://www.arth.upenn.edu/nalin/nalin.html
Homepage for an exhibition entitled "Cooking for the Gods: The Art of Home Ritual in Bengal" organized for the Newark Museum. Links to images of Shrines, Deities, Implements, Utensils, Architecture and Ornament, Votive, Objects and Toys.

The Ramakien in Thai Art - http://www.mahidol.ac.th/Thailand/art/ramakien.html
General article about the Ramakien (the Thai telling of the story of Rama) with some great images and lots of links.

Wayang Golek - http://bandung.wasantara.net.id/wayang1.htm
Summary and image of the wooden puppet plays of West Java.

Mithila - http://www.khazana.com/folk/mithila.html
A short summary of the Rama story adapted from an excerpt by Carolyn H. Brown. The site also includes an image of the snake goddess.

Mithila Paintings: The Art of Bihar India
http://www-cgr.syr.edu/path/public_html/GroupA/Lowe/Mithila.html
Syracuse U. web pages of Mithila paintings. An alphabetical list of statues available for purchase from JBL - will link you with a nice image of the statues including Hanuman, Ganesh, etc.

Madhubani Paintings - http://www.clas.ufl.edu/users/gthursby/rc/
This site includes an extensive collection of images of Madhubani paintings, the famous art made by women in the North Indian state of Bihar, with descriptions of each of the paintings, and explanations of their significance. The links to Mithila paintings above refer to the same kind of paintings as Madhubani. Mithila and Madhubani are two different names to refer to the same region in Bihar, India.

Social Studies School Service -
http://catalog.socialstudies.com/c/@30guOehrqhV8Y/Pages/index.html
Social Studies School Service is an educational supply house located in the L.A. area. Much of their material is catalogued on-line, and they often have on-line lessons and resources posted. They have fairly extensive resources on India for sale. Their site provides search capabilities within their own materials and links to searching the rest of the web. Various other on-line resources on India can be accessed directly through their web site as well.

The Hindi Lessons Web Page - http://syllabus.syr.edu/hin/jshankar/hin101/hindi.html
Learn to read and write Hindi language by visiting this site and trying out the lessons presented here.

How to Wrap a Sari - http://www.maxwell.syr.edu/gai/default.htm
If you have ever wondered how do Indian women wrap the saree around them, here is your chance to find out!